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HOLIDAY AND OTHER POEMS

JOHN DAVIDSON

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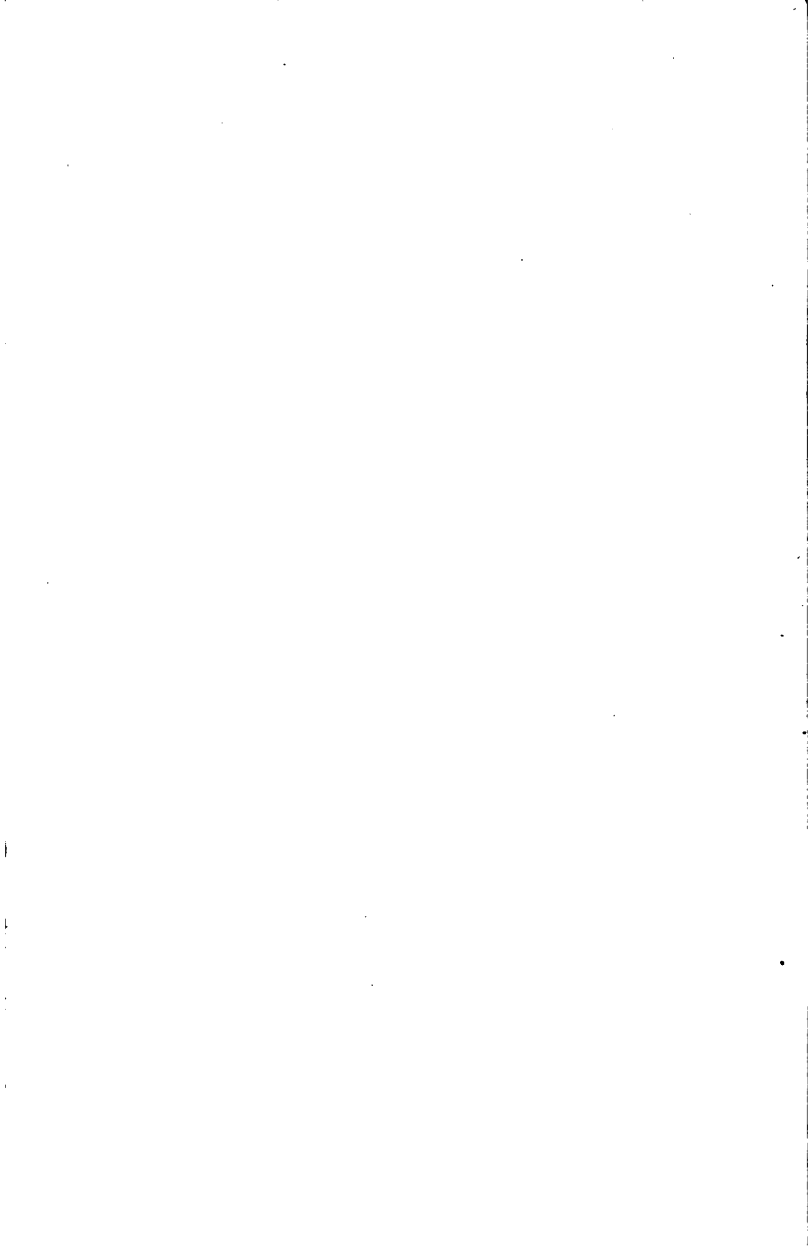
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3

HOLIDAY

AND OTHER POEMS

WITH A NOTE ON POETRY

BY

JOHN DAVIDSON

LONDON

E. GRANT RICHARDS

1906

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Shapleigh fund

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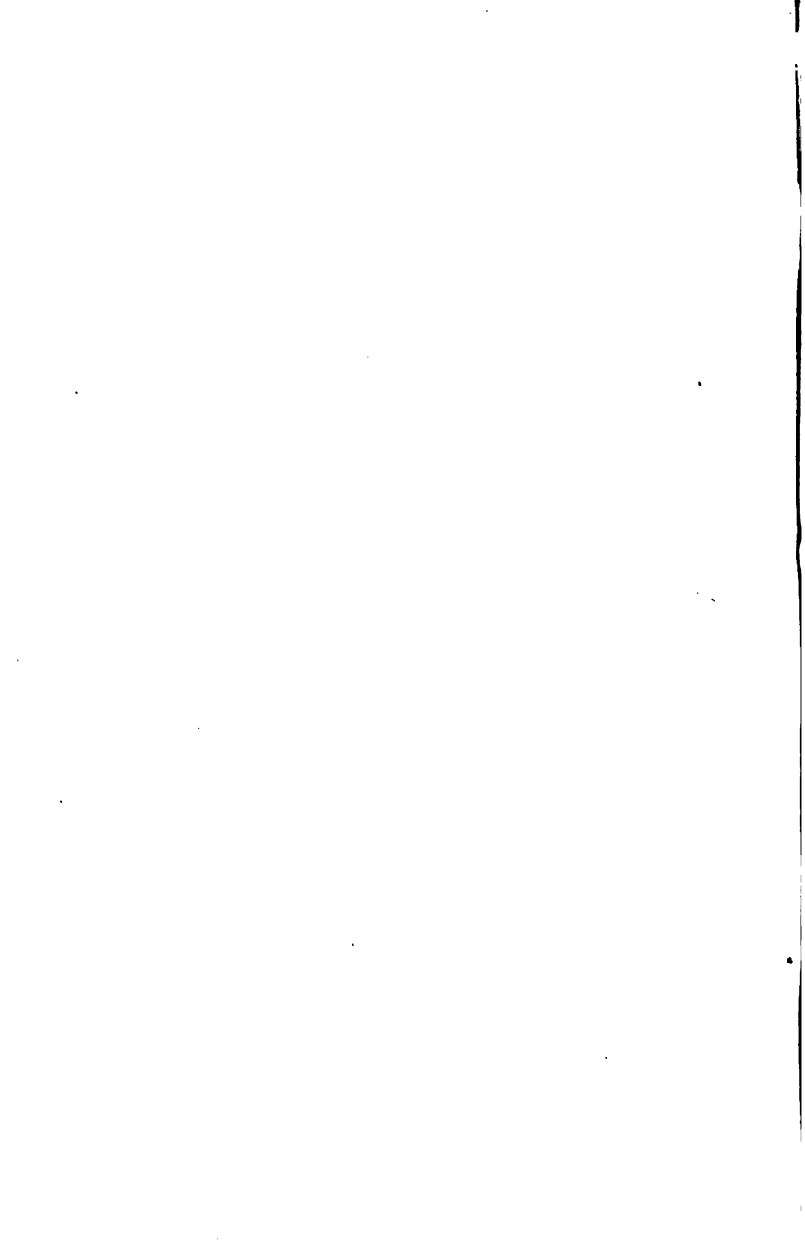
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POEMS



HOLIDAY

LITHE and listen, gentlemen :
Other knight of sword or pen
Shall not, while the planets shine,
Spend a holiday like mine :—

Fate and I, we played at dice :
Thrice I won and lost the main ;
Thrice I died the death, and thrice
By my will I lived again.

First, a woman broke my heart,
As a careless woman can,
Ere the aureoles depart
From the woman and the man.

Dead of love, I found a tomb
Anywhere : beneath, above,
Worms nor stars transpierced the gloom
Of the sepulchre of love.

Wine-cups were the charnel-lights ;
Festal songs, the funeral dole ;
Joyful ladies, gallant knights,
Comrades of my buried soul.

Tired to death of lying dead
In a common sepulchre,
On an Easter morn I sped
Upward where the world's astir.

Soon I gathered wealth and friends ;
Donned the livery of the hour ;
And atoning diverse ends
Bridged the gulf to place and power.

All the brilliances of Hell

Crushed by me, with honeyed breath

Fawned upon me till I fell,

By pretenders done to death.

Buried in an outland tract,

Long I rotted in the mould,

Though the virgin woodland lacked

Nothing of the age of gold.

Roses spiced the dews and damps

Nightly falling of decay ;

Dawn and sunset lit the lamps

Where entombed I deeply lay.

My Companions of the Grave

Were the flowers, the growing grass ;

Larks intoned a morning stave ;

Nightingales, a midnight mass.

But at me, effete and dead,
Did my spirit gibe and scoff:
Then the gravecloth from my head,
And my shroud—I shook them off!

Drawing strength and subtle craft
Out of ruin's husk and core,
Through the earth I ran a shaft
Upward to the light once more.

Soon I made me wealth and friends';
Donned the livery of the age;
And atoning many ends
Reigned as sovereign, priest, and mage.

But my pomp and towering state,
Puissance and supreme device
Crumbled on the cast of Fate—
Fate, that plays with loaded dice.

I whose arms had harried Hell
Naked faced a heavenly host :
Carved with countless wounds I fell,
Sadly yielding up the ghost.

In a burning mountain thrown
(Titans such a tomb attain)
Many a grisly age had flown
Ere I rose and lived again.

Parched and charred I lay ; my cries
Shook and rent the mountain-side ;
Lustres, decades, centuries
Fled while daily there I died.

But my essence and intent
Ripened in the smelting fire :
Flame became my element ;
Agony, my soul's desire.

Twenty centuries of Pain,
 Mightier than Love or Art,
Woke the meaning in my brain
 And the purpose of my heart.

Straightway then aloft I swam
 Through the mountain's sulphurous sty:
Not eternal death could damn
 Such a hardy soul as I.

From the mountain's burning crest
 Like a god I come again,
And with an immortal zest
 Challenge Fate to throw the main.

THE LAST SONG

"SONGSTER"—say you?—"sing!"

Not a note have I!

Effort cannot bring

Fancy from the sky:

Hark!—the rusty string!

Leave me here to die.

"Songster, songster, sing!

Tune your harp and try.

Sing! we bid you sing

Once before you die!"

Withered, angry, mad,

Who would list to me,

Since my singing sad
 Troubled earth and sea
When my heart was glad
 And my fancy free ?
 “Sad or joyful, sing !
 Look about, above !
 Trust the world and sing
 Once again of love !”

Love ? I know the word :
 Love is of the rose.
Have you seen or heard
 Love among the snows ?
Yet my heart is stirred !
 Nay, my fancy glows !
 “Summon all your powers ;
 Sing of joy or woe—
 Love among the flowers,
 Love amidst the snow.”

Death is but a trance :

Life, but now begun !

Welcome change and chance :

Though my days are done,

Let the planets dance

Lightly round the sun !

Morn and evening clasp

Earth with loving hands—

In a ruddy grasp

All the pleasant lands !

Now I hear the deep

Bourdon of the bee,

Like a sound asleep

Wandering o'er the lea ;

While the song-birds keep

Urging nature's plea.

Hark ! the violets pray

Swooning in the sun !

Hush ! the roses say

Love and death are one !

Loud my dying rhyme

Like a trumpet rings ;

Love in death sublime

Soars on sovran wings,

While the world and time

Fade like shadowy things.

“Love upon his lip

Hovers loath to part ;

Death's benignant grip

Fastens on his heart.”

Look, a victor hies

Bloody from the fight,

And a woman's eyes

Greet him in the night—

Softly from the skies

Like sidereal light !

“Love is all in all,

Life and death are great.

Bring a purple pall ;

Bury him in state.”

A RUNNABLE STAG

WHEN the pods went pop on the broom, green
broom,

And apples began to be golden-skinned,
We harboured a stag in the Priory coomb,
And we feathered his trail up-wind, up-wind,
We feathered his trail up-wind—

A stag of warrant, a stag, a stag,

A runnable stag, a kingly crop,

Brow, bay and tray and three on top,

A stag, a runnable stag.

Then the huntsman's horn rang yap, yap, yap,
And "Forwards" we heard the harbourer
shout ;

But 'twas only a brocket that broke a gap
In the beechen underwood, driven out,
From the underwood antlered out
By warrant and might of the stag, the stag,
The runnable stag, whose lordly mind
Was bent on sleep, though beamed and
tined
He stood, a runnable stag.

So we tufted the covert till afternoon
With Tinkerman's Pup and Bell-of-the-North;
And hunters were sulky and hounds out of tune
Before we tufted the right stag forth,
Before we tufted him forth,
The stag of warrant, the wily stag,
The runnable stag with his kingly crop,
Brow, bay and tray and three on top,
The royal and runnable stag.

It was Bell-of-the-North and Tinkerman's
Pup

That stuck to the scent till the copse was
drawn.

"Tally ho ! tally ho !" and the hunt was up,
The tufters whipped and the pack laid on,
The resolute pack laid on,
And the stag of warrant away at last,
The runnable stag, the same, the same,
His hoofs on fire, his horns like flame,
A stag, a runnable stag.

"Let your gelding be : if you check or chide
He stumbles at once and you're out of the
hunt ;

For three hundred gentlemen, able to ride,
On hunters accustomed to bear the brunt,
Accustomed to bear the brunt,

Are after the runnable stag, the stag,
The runnable stag with his kingly crop,
Brow, bay and tray and three on top,
The right, the runnable stag."

By perilous paths in coomb and dell,
The heather, the rocks, and the river-bed,
The pace grew hot, for the scent lay well,
And a runnable stag goes right ahead,
The quarry went right ahead—
Ahead, ahead, and fast and far ;
His antlered crest, his cloven hoof,
Brow, bay and tray and three aloof,
The stag, the runnable stag.

For a matter of twenty miles and more,
By the densest hedge and the highest
wall,

Through herds of bullocks he baffled the lore
Of harbourer, huntsman, hounds and all,
Of harbourer hounds and all—

The stag of warrant, the wily stag,
For twenty miles, and five and five,
He ran, and he never was caught alive,
This stag, this runnable stag.

When he turned at bay in the leafy gloom,
In the emerald gloom where the brook ran
deep,

He heard in the distance the rollers boom,
And he saw in a vision of peaceful sleep,
In a wonderful vision of sleep,

A stag of warrant, a stag, a stag,
A runnable stag in a jewelled bed,
Under the sheltering ocean dead,
A stag, a runnable stag.

So a fateful hope lit up his eye,
And he opened his nostrils wide again,
And he tossed his branching antlers high
As he headed the hunt down the Charlock glen,
As he raced down the echoing glen
For five miles more, the stag, the stag,
For twenty miles, and five and five,
Not to be caught now, dead or alive,
The stag, the runnable stag.

Three hundred gentlemen, able to ride,
Three hundred horses as gallant and free,
Beheld him escape on the evening tide,
Far out till he sank in the Severn Sea,
Till he sank in the depths of the sea—
The stag, the buoyant stag, the stag
That slept at last in a jewelled bed
Under the sheltering ocean spread,
The stag, the runnable stag.

MERRY ENGLAND

ISLAND-KINGDOM, our island-state,
Merry England, where fancy dwells
In pageant, pilgrimage, high debate,
And sprightly music of morris-bells ;
Tourneys for love and battles for hate ;
Torches, garlands, exultant bells—
Challenging trumpets and festal bells ;
Wars of the Roses, land-locked strife,
World-wide wars with France and Spain :
The colour and pulse of that gallant life—
Shall we never recover the mood again ?

Rhythmic deeds, melodious words :—

Merry England, the heart of mirth :—

Songs of lovers and songs of birds ;

A bell for death and a bell for birth—

Jubilant fifths and sombre thirds :

Pessimist ? Optimist ?—death and birth !

Englishmen only on English earth !

Confident daring, travail and strife,

Battle and storm on the Spanish Main—

How shall the fancy that donned that life

Be decked and renewed with such pride
again ?

England's fancy shall live again—

Merry England across the seas !—

Jewelled with isles of the Spanish Main,

Gifts of the opulent destinies :

England's heart and England's brain,

Throbbing and thinking in many seas

Belov'd of the opulent destinies.

Bluebird, oriole, bobolink,

Hark to them, hear them how they sing,
Where England's Canadians work and think,
Woo and wed in the throng of Spring !

Axes ring on the mountain-sides—

England's gain from England's loss !—
Lonely at night the ranchman rides,
Humming a tune to the Southern Cross ;
Argosies on Austral tides,
From Charles's Wain to the Southern Cross,
Barter the Plough for the Southern Cross !
Lord ! how the English hew their way,
Courage and fortune leading the van !
Round the world with the break of day,
Room for him, room for the Englishman !

Saxon, Norman, Dansker, Celt—

Merry England, mother of mirth !—

Gird the earth with an English belt,
Englishmen all to the ends of the earth !
Gold and grain on Rand and Veldt,
Orchards, harvests over the earth—
Liners and merchantmen round the earth ;
Power from East to Western Ind,
Power and pomp on the Indian Main,
And wonder with every whispering wind
To dip our dreams in the dew again.

England, decked and dowered by fate—
Room for England, so please you room !
Sea-Kings' realm, our Ocean-state,
Woven upon the world's wide loom ;
Dyed and tried in high debate,
And ever renewed on the world's wide loom,
With weaying fleets in a world-wide loom—
Warp and woof of the sea's wide loom :

Shall garnish fancy in every land

With rhythmic deed and delight again—

Merry England from strand to strand,

From the Spanish Main to the Indian Main.

LABURNUM AND LILAC

WHERE the New River strays,
Eddying in olive green
And chrysophrase,
And briefly seen
In traffic-troubled ways,
Laburnum showers
Its verdant gold,
Its clustered flowers
Instilled and scrolled
With emerald sap :
Green-tinted gold
In April's lap
Unpursed, unrolled ;

A mint of flowers,
A hoard untold,
Laburnine showers
Of greenish gold.

Like ostrich plumes
The jolly donahs wear,
Light-tressed or dark,
The lilac blooms
In every park and square
And blooms in Finsbury Park ;
Or heliotrope or mauve,
Snowy or dark,
The lilac blooms
In white and purple plumes.

“What ? Russell Square !”
There’s lilac there !

And Torrington

And Woburn Square

Intrepid don

The season's wear.

In Gordon Square and Euston Square—

There's lilac, there's laburnum there !

In green and gold and lavender

Queen Square and Bedford Square,

All Bloomsbury and all Soho

With every sunbeam gayer grow,

Greener grow and gayer.

The lindens in the Mall

Resound with bees ;

The plane-trees shed their bark—

The eager trees

That promptly grow so tall ;

And in St. James's Park

Full-throated chant
The song-thrush and the merle
Till dusk forbids,
And dim-eyed night encamps
Where now the chestnuts vaunt
Their leafy pyramids
And lustrous lamps
Of ruby, gold, and pearl ;
But in St. James's shade
Of elms antique,
The mystic porch
Of Nature's bridal-room
That coupled songsters seek,
The lilac swings a censer
Of ravishing perfume,
And rich laburnums braid
The green-gilt gloom
With flame intenser
Than the chestnut's torch.

APPLE-TREES

WHEN autumn stains and dapples
The diverse land,
Thickly studded with apples
The apple-trees stand.

Their mystery none discovers,
So none can tell—
Not the most passionate lovers
Of garth and fell;
For the silent sunlight weaves
The orchard spell,
Bough, bole, and root,
Mysterious, hung with leaves,
Embossed with fruit.

Though merle and throstle were loud,
Silent *their* passion in spring,
A blush of blossom wild-scented ;
And now when no song-birds sing,
They are heavy with apples and proud
And supremely contented—
All fertile and green and sappy,
No wish denied,
Exceedingly quiet and happy
And satisfied !

No jealousy, anger, or fashion
Of strife
Perturbs in their stations
The apple-trees. Life
Is an effortless passion,
Fruit, bough, and stem,
A beautiful patience
For them.

Frost of the harvest-moon
Changes their sap to wine ;
Ruddy and golden soon
Their clustered orbs will shine,
By favour
Of many a wind,
Of morn and noon and night,
Fulfilled from core to rind
With savour
Of all delight.

NOVEMBER

I

Regent's Park

POPLARS, ashes, flaunting wreaths of June
Green among the tarnished oaks, outstayed
Lindens, plane-trees, chestnuts, elms so soon
Ragged, draggle-tailed, or stripped and flayed.

Somnolent canal and urban wold,
Lawn and lake with saffron leaves and red,
Crimson leaves and olive, brown and gold,
Bronze and topaz' leaves engarlanded,

Underneath the feet of winter flung—

Cloth of Bagdad richer than the stuff

Woven in Tyrian looms, by poets sung

Barbarous when the world was young enough

Frankly to adore a purple stain—

Graced the season mantled in its breath

Glittering pale, or draped in swarthy rain,

Victor in decay and peer of death.

II

The Enfield Road

Capitalled and coped with massive cloud,

Lofty elms, a wayside colonnade,

Shaft or bole erect and interboughed,

Forestward, a beckoning passage made.

Like a golden haze, a misty veil
 Diapered with sequins, foliage lined
All the vista, yellow discs and frail
 Stalks that snapped against the chariest wind.

Flapping rooks alit on blighted sheaves ;
 Ruddy haws in ragged hedges glowed ;
Elfin companies of withered leaves
 Pattered nowhere down the sodden road.

Sullen in the west across the floor
 Swept and garnished of the wintry plain,
Sunset smouldered like a furnace-door
 Black and shot with cramoisie in grain.

III

Epping Forest

Woods and coppices by tempest lashed ;
Pollard shockheads glaring in the rain ;
Jet-black underwood with crimson splashed—
Rich November, one wet crimson stain !

Turf that whispered moistly to the tread ;
Bursts of laughter from the shuffled leaves ;
Pools of light in distant arbours spread ;
Depths of darkness under forest eaves.

High above the wind the clouds at rest
Emptied every vat and steeply hurled
Reservoirs and floods ; the wild nor'west
Raked the downpour ere it reached the world ;

Part in wanton sport and part in ire,
 Flights of rain on ruddy foliage rang :
Woven showers like sheets of silver fire
 Streamed; and all the forest rocked and sang.

IV

Box Hill

Brilliant month by legend slandered so !
 Down in Surrey in the shining air
Mid-November saw the woodland grow
 Green as summer still, and still as fair :

Elms perhaps, and fragrant limes forlorn
 Drooped a branch, yet half I thought to hear
Men and swift machines among the corn,
 Voices and the ringing harvest-gear.

Sunset saw I from the sinuous height

Box Hill rears on sombre Mulla's bank :

Darker and more dark the ruby light

Over Polsdon Arbour dying sank ;

But or ever Time's nocturnal seal

Fixed the doom of day, the mid-moon's power

Did in star-attended state repeal

Darkness and the sentence of the hour.

V

London, W.

Deep delight in volume, sound, and mass,

Shadow, colour, movement, multitudes,

Murmurs, cries, the traffic's rolling bass—

Subtle city of a thousand moods !

Distance, rumour, mystery, things that count,
Bravely in the memory scored and limned !
Sunset, welling like a crimson fount
Underneath the Marble Arch, o'erbrimm'd

All the smoky west. In Oxford Street
Lamps, like jewels fallen by the way
While the sun upon his urban beat
Bore the lofty burden of the day,

Magnified their offices and grew
Vital and a rosary of light,
Wreathing life that gathered heart anew
Hungry for the pleasure of the night.

Trees of winter's nakedness aware
Gleamed and disappeared like things afraid,
Dryads of the terrace and the square,
Silvery in the shadow and the shade.

Swarthy-purple creepers draped the high
Houses ; leaves in elm-tree tops astir
Blurred like flakes of soot the darkling sky,
Lit with faded light of lavender.

VI

The Chilterns

I remember once a glorious thing
Crowned the season in my wandering time.
Through the year I went from earliest Spring
Hither, thither, weaving prose and rhyme,

Like a gleeman of the former age.
Sound and colour were my pensioners ;
Constant on my passionate pilgrimage
Love attended me, and friends of hers,

Life and Death besides. But one day, late
Roaming in the Chilterns, want of will
Irked me, and the impotence of Fate—
Something lacking in the World, until

Bluff November in the coppice near
Loud on orient horns an onset wound,
While the larks that through the golden year
Garlanded the air with dazzling sound,

Surged upon the tempest's deafening cry—
Crests of foam about the ocean driven,
Lightning scribbled on a thund'rous sky,
Tongues of flame upon the top of heaven !

YULETIDE

NOW wheel and hoof and horn
In every street
Stunned to its chimney-tops,
In every murky street—
Each lamp-lit gorge by traffic rent
Asunder,
Ravines of serried shops
By business tempests torn—
In every echoing street,
From early morn
Till jaded night falls dead,
Wheel, hoof, and horn
Tumultuous thunder

Beat
Under
A noteless firmament
Of lead.

When the winds list
A fallen cloud
Where yellow dregs of light
Befouled remain,
The woven gloom
Of smoke and mist,
The soot-entangled rain
That jumbles day and night
In city and town,
An umber-emerald shroud
Rehearsing doom,
The London fog comes down.
But sometimes silken beams,

As bright
As adamant on fire,
Of the uplifted sun's august attire,
With frosty fibrous light
Magnetic shine
On happier dreams
That abrogate despair,
When all the sparkling air
Of smoke and sulphur shriven,
Like an iced wine
Fills the high cup
Of heaven ;
For urban park and lawn,
The city's scenery,
Heaths, commons, dells
That compass London rich
In greenery,
With diamond-dust of rime

Empowdered, flash
At dawn ;
And tossing bells
Of stealthy hansoms chime
With silvery crash
In radiant ways
Attuned and frozen up
To concert pitch—
In resonant ways,
Where wheels and hoofs inwrought,
Cars, omnibuses, wains,
Beat, boom, and clash
Discordant fugal strains
Of cymbals, trumpets, drums ;
While careless to arrive,
The nerved pedestrian comes
Exulting in the splendour overhead,
And in the live

Elastic ground,
The pavement, tense and taut,
That yields a twangling sound
At every tread.

ECLOGUES

I

THE IDES OF MARCH

PERCY HERBERT BASIL NINIAN SANDY

PERCY

WHERE the brimming freshets rush
And the pebbles chafe and ring,
The leafless alders flush
With purple of the Spring.

HERBERT

And the crimson osiers burn
With spathes that swell and split,
And every bract an urn
With twinkling catkins lit.

BASIL

Where chaos spreads unkempt,
And formless being roves,
I wandered lost
Until I crossed
The ultramundane groves,
And dreamt last night, as Cæsar dreamt,
I placed my hand in Jove's.

NINIAN

And music sighed and sang,
And voices uttered doom,
And Mars's armour rang
Untouched in Cæsar's room.
Most ominous of woe,
A wondering slave appeared,
Whose fingers flamed below—

SANDY

A candelabrum weird!

NINIAN

Titanic beings fought,
In fiery arms on high ;
The Universe was wrought
To tragic sympathy ;
Nor can the years dispel
The awe of that ; nor can
The tongues of poets tell
The deed these signs foreran,
For on the morrow fell
The greatest man.

BASIL

What cry ? what whispered word ?

PERCY

What music wild and sweet ?

HERBERT

The listening air is stirred.

SANDY

The sounds are in the street.

BASIL

I hear a murmuring flood.

PERCY

I hear a trembling string.

NINIAN

The sounds are in our blood.

BASIL

The sounds are of the Spring.

HERBERT

The throstle in the brake,
Alone, and hid away,
Beginning to rehearse
His long-considered lay,

Because the blossoms wake
On the elms, the first in flower,
Repeats a broken verse
And tunes it by the hour.

PERCY

And his cousin thinks him a dunce,
The blackbird, he who sings
At the top of his voice at once
While the startled woodland rings :
He peals his splendid song
Loud and fluent and clear,
For echo to prolong
And all the world to hear.

HERBERT

Now like a golden gong ;
Now like a crystal sphere.

PERCY

For echo to prolong
And all the world to hear.

BASIL

What sound is this that comes
At sunset lowly pitched ?
The roll of elfin drums
Or song of things bewitched ?
Perhaps the nightwind strums
The wires, with news enriched
Of peace, and silent drums—
With happy news enriched
Of silent, sleeping drums,
With war no more bewitched.

NINIAN

At least the springtime comes ;
For I hear in a valley I know

A sound of elfin drums,
And a shadowy clarion blow,
As the crimson threads and thrums
In the twilight sky decay,
And the wandering beetle hums
The threnody of day.

SANDY

When the spacious darkness comes,
And the crimson lights decay,
The ponderous beetle hums
The threnody of day.

HERBERT

The nightwind sighs and sings.

PERCY

The darkness deepening comes.

BASIL

The antique curfew rings
To the roll of elfin drums.

NINIAN

The flickering threads and thrums,
The ruddy brands decay ;
And the mournful beetle hums
The threnody of day.

BASIL

But soon the wakening comes,
And darkness dies forlorn ;
And the thunder of the drums
Of the March wind ushers morn.

NINIAN

And woes that wound the sight,
And spectres disappear.

PERCY

And men are men of might.

HERBERT

And love is crystal-clear.

SANDY

And I swear by the light,

And the noon and the night,

It is good, it is good to be here !

II

ST. MARK'S EVE

BASIL

NINIAN

VIVIAN

BASIL

LATE, Vivian ! Midnight stirs
In the placid bosom of Time.

VIVIAN

I have been in the wildwood, sirs,
In the snare of a sovran rhyme ;
Where blossoms and feathers and furs
Grow rich as a dazzling rhyme—
With stains of a fragrant rhyme ;

And the very spathes and spurs
Are tuned to the deafening chime
Of the larks and the courage that stirs
In the heart of the vernal prime.

NINIAN

In the wildwood ? Here or beyond ?
At home in the world or afar ?
Where the bracken unfurls a frond,
Or a nebula loosens a star—
Where the fern delivers a frond,
Or a nebula utters a star ?

VIVIAN

At home. In this hermit-nook
Of conscious pleasure and pain
I journeyed to listen and look—
With wonder to listen and look

In the Warren and Honey Lane,
By the Quicks and the Cuckoo brook
From Epping to Chingford Plain.
Where the passion of Nature stirs
Undisciplined, up and down
I wandered the wildwood, sirs,
On the margin of London town—
In the forest that's ours and hers
On the threshold of London town.

NINIAN

Did you see then the blackthorn blaze
Against the empurpled glow
Of the glades and the woodland ways?
Did the violet forest glow
Where the budded leaf delays,
And chaplets pallid as snow
On the twisted blackthorn blaze—

Coronals, garlands, sprays
Like fresh, moon-silvered snow ?

BASIL

Did you hear from Highbeach tower
The mellow quarter-chime—
From the belfry of Highbeach tower
Did you hear the music of Time,
Like silken banners unfurled ?
From the ancient and hallowed bower
Of the virginal bride of the world,
Did you hear the melodious hour
Like broidered banners unfurled—
With the dulcet and virginal power
Of Time, the bride of the world ?

VIVIAN

I saw the blackthorn blaze
Like wreaths of moonlit snow,

Where the budded leaf delays
And the violet woodlands glow ;
From Highbeach steepled tower
I heard the quarter-chime—
From the ancient and hallowed bower
Of the beautiful virgin, Time,
I heard the melodious vesper hour
And the sprightly quarter-chime.
Then the blackbird finished his song
On a penetrant, resolute note ;
Though the thrush descanted long,
For he knows no tune by rote—
With sighs descanted long
Of the sorrow he aches to tell ;
With sobs and shuddering moans,
Like one that sings in Hell,
He laced the phantom over-tones
Of the mellow vesper-bell :

Some terror he fain would tell,
But he never can strike the note :
So the thrush descanted long,
While the blackbird finished his song.
And the woodwele's laughter ceased
In his ash-green gurgling throat
On the fringe of the tones released
By the vibrant vesper-bell—
The forest laughter ceased
In the wake of the twilight bell,
And high, so high, from the dusky sky
The last lark breathless fell.
But the nightingales sang on
Like welling founts of sound,
As the saffron sunset paler shone
And the darkness grew profound ;
The nightingales sang on
And the sleepless cuckoos beat

Their dulcimers anon, anon,
In the echoing woodland street—
Their golden dulcimers anon
In every forest street.
And lo! from their secret bowers
In the shadowy depths of the chace,
With lanterns jewelled like flowers
In state at a stately pace—
The elfin-folk from their hallowed bowers
In the innermost shrine of the chace,
Came, swinging their fragrant and luminous
 flowers,
To dance in the market-place—
Came with their dances and lanterned flowers
To the forest's market-place.
And I watched them dancing for hours
In elfin pomp and state :
I saw the elves and I watched them for hours,
And therefore I come so late.

BASIL

How say you ? An April tale
Of the nightingale's song and the lark's ;
Or a vision at best, or a dream ?

NINIAN

Nay, for enchantments prevail,
And things are as strange as they seem.
At the mystical Tide of St. Mark's
A pregnant fantasy stirs,
And prodigies happen o' nights.

VIVIAN

And I saw them, I saw them, sirs—
The elves in their woodland rites !
When the vesper-bell had rung,
And the last lark dropped from the sky ;
When the cuckoo's golden tongue,

And the nightingale's rhapsody
Full-filled the forest with sound,
From their secret and hallowed bowers
In the woodland depths profound,
From the innermost heart of the chace,
The elves with their lanterned flowers
Trooped forth at an elfin pace ;
And I watched them dancing for hours
In the forest's market-place.

III

THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF MAY

BASIL NINIAN BRIAN VIVIAN LIONEL

BRIAN

MUST this be Empire-Day ?

BASIL

The date is fixed.

BRIAN

Forfend

The omen, powers on high !

BASIL

Shame, traitor, shame ! Amend

So treasonous a sigh.

Empire and Empire-Day—

BRIAN

I still mistrust them, I!—

BASIL

Have come and come to stay!

BRIAN

I hate the name, the thing!
You know the prophets say,
“Empire begins the end:
The loves, the hopes we sing,
Our sweetest common good
Will fade, their source decay,
And fancy’s naïve device
Unmourned depart away—
Art and our freer mood
For ever and a day.”
So stiff is empire’s price,
The penalty of power.

NINIAN

But the drama of the woods,
That deepens every hour,
No change in men can change,
While the murmuring cushat broods,
And the restless fern-owls range
The night-winds interstrown
With wonders, jewelled wings
Of moths and chafers—sown
With silken singing wings
Of lost nocturnal things.

LIONEL

Not fear, not love, not hate,
Not shame, not wounded pride
Can heighten or abate
The jocund summer-tide

That blossoms hour by hour—
The surf and crested tide
Of the fragrant hawthorn flower.

VIVIAN

No human joy or care,
Not envy, age, or pain,
Not the whole world's despair
Can tarnish, taint, or stain
One gold-bossed silver shield
Of the daisies of the field—
The land-wide Milky Way
Of the myriad eyes of day.

BRIAN

To me the amber studs
Of the kingcups on the leas,
And the fragrant hawthorn buds
Are but the earth's disease ;

And the daisies in the grass
A snowy leprosy.

BASIL

Hush, slanderer, hush ! Alas,
How deep your discontent !

BRIAN

Imperial thoughts for me
Decolour and unscent
The violet and the rose ;
For empire is the womb
Of teeming wars and woes,
The enemy of chance
That keeps the world in hope,
And the murderer and the tomb
Of art and all romance.

BASIL

If that's the only ill,
The source of all your gloom,
No longer need you mope.
Such dire imperial doom
Has been, and shadows still
All landlocked empire, shut
In one unhealthy room ;
A drilled mechanic state
That jolts in one deep rut—
Whose grave, or soon or late,
Is its habitual rut,
By time and chance and fate
For ever sealed and shut.

BRIAN

Infallible rebuke
That shames imperial pride !

BASIL

The doom that overtook
The empires of the past ;
The doom that must betide
All rule however fast
Enfeoffed with power and law,
That makes its interest, first and last,
To hold the world in awe.
But England's Ocean-state
Enthroned upon the sea,
The armed and equal mate
Of power and liberty,
Has this for doom and fate—
To set the peoples free.

LIONEL

Nobler than empire—word
Ill-omened, out of date !—

What name shall be conferred
On England's Ocean-state ?

BASIL

We need no other name ;
Our origin, our fate,
Our history speaks, our fame,
In England's Ocean-state.

VIVIAN

Wherever England comes
The lowliest has his chance.

LIONEL

Our English story sums
The meaning of Romance.

BASIL

We bid the poet drink
Till Hippocrene be dry,

And the thinker dare to think
The sun out of the sky.

LIONEL

We bid the dreamer, drunk
With dreaming, dream again ;
And fakir, mollah, monk
To any heaven attain.

BASIL

Then though these isles were sunk
And buried in the sea,
Our England would remain
Wherever men are free.

NINIAN

Embattled usage falls
At the beating of our drums ;

All proud originals

Have scope where England comes.

VIVIAN

As free as birds that sing

And serenade the morn.

LIONEL

As the swallow on the wing,

Or the blackbird on the thorn.

BASIL

Or the throstle, purged of scorn

For the music in his heart—

That takes such loving pains

To school his angry heart,

And now at last attains

The mastery of his art.

IV

BAPTIST TIDE

BASIL LIONEL BRIAN MENZIES

BASIL

OUTCAST and vagrant, hail !
Unhappy, wandering star,
You sojourn *here*, unchid ;
We love you—as you are,
Rejected, scorned, forbid,
Targe of the world's abuse.

LIONEL

What nectar, dark or pale,
To drink your happier cheer in ?
What brew, what auburn ale,

What blood, what golden juice
Of Albany or Erin ?

MENZIES

The grape, the grape : no malt,
To deaden soul and sense.
Let some illustrious wine
My heart and brain exalt,
And crowded opulence
Of fantasy be mine.

BASIL

Your brain shall teem with sights
Desirable as youth ;
And sense and soul divide
The ravished world between them.

BRIAN

Bethink you, sirs : in sooth
We should be Nazarites,
For this is Baptist Tide.

LIONEL

Let formalists demean them
As ancient modes provide :
We take no oath, no vow ;
Nor shall our hearts abide
In bondage of the past.

BASIL

The adolescent world
Is but beginning now ;
And men are men at last.

BRIAN

Yet the sweet heaven unfurled
About us like a rose,
Nor ending, nor beginning,
Nor age, nor ailment knows.

LIONEL

Though that were certain, folk
Who cannot make an end
Of simple-hearted sinning,
Who have their lives to spend,
And must endure the yoke
Of human joys and woes,
Seek still a new beginning,
Desire a sweeter song,
Expect the compassed close
Of misery and wrong.

BASIL

A cup of wine can change
Despair to deep delight.

BRIAN

An overture that jars
Upon our mood! We range

The purlieus of the night
On thoughts that seek the stars;
You drag us down to earth,
And urge a vinous mirth !

BASIL

Nay, now ; fill, drink, and mark :—
A Burgundy mature ;
Romanée Conti, dark
As carmine jewels, pure
As Côte d'Or's golden noons,
And spiced with dewy scent
Of rich autumnal moons.

BRIAN

A wine whose virtue's spent
Before the lees appear !

BASIL

By Dionysius, no !
A mystery slumbers here,
A rite, a sacrament,
Whose nature I can show.
We drink material power ;
The inmost soul of wine
Is adamant, the flower
Of carbon : light and heat
Long-hoarded in the mine ;
Mettle of bread and meat ;
The dawn whose crimson flood
Intoxicates the east ;
The tissue and the heart
Of organism ; the blood,
The seed of man and beast
Become by Nature's art
Sterile as candent flame,

And yet the stuff, the breath
Of noble strife, of fame,
Of myths that folk invent
To give the past a name ;
Ethereal life in death,
Potable ravishment.

LIONEL

The naked facts ; the truth ;
The power, the poetry !

BASIL

Now will our outcast see
Some vision of his youth ;
Of summer's flower and leaf,
Of emprise meetly done ;
A happy gleaner's sheaf,
Or love, or battle won ;
Some joy beyond belief :

For he has drunk the sun,
Drunk up the night and day,
Drunk down the dregs of grief,
And drunk the world away.

LIONEL

He sees us not, nor hears ;
A glory fills his eyes,
Like one through crystal tears
Beholding Paradise.

MENZIES

Not rubies set in gold
Of matchless flame and worth,
But dawn and sunset scrolled
About the emerald earth !
Oh, moon of my desire,
Bend from your heaven above,

A lily sweet, on fire
With newly budded love !
Bend from your heaven ; be mine
Once more before I die,
And let life's hallowed wine
Empurple earth and sky
In hyacinthine hours,
And dusky midnights hung
With stars and passion-flowers
And ecstasies unsung !

LIONEL

Entranced into the street
He wanders like a shade !

BRIAN

He treads on wingèd feet :
I think his grave is made !

BASIL

His soul is bathed in light,
His heart for love athirst :
Were he to die to-night
I scarce should call him curst.

V

THE FEAST OF ST. MARTHA

BASIL LIONEL VIVIAN BRIAN

BRIAN

PERTURBED by wealth, perturbed by want,

With angered brain and breaking heart,

Why will the world the market haunt ?

If folk would choose the better part !

LIONEL

Folk must be troubled ; work and think ;

Devote their strength ; exhaust their health.

I love St. Martha, meat and drink,

Labour and thrift, and skill and wealth.

VIVIAN

If exorcism avail not, leave
The phantom woes you sorrow for.

BRIAN

No phantoms ; facts : for facts I grieve,
Authentic things that dreams abhor :—
Imprisoned clouds that spin and weave
Complex machinery of war

(Torpedoes, cannon, latent rage
Impounding peace) as easily
As happy playmates knit a cage
Of rushes for a butterfly.

LIONEL

And chastened lightning, pick and choice
Of all man's wonder-working might,

A public scribe, an airy voice,
The dazzling conqueror of the night !

BASIL

To whisper over heath and holt,
To herald tidings everywhere,
To travel on a thunder-bolt
By land, or sea, or middle air !

VIVIAN

The docile lightning ! Jupiter,
Could no foreboding Proteus see
Your armament celestial wear
The livery of humanity !

BRIAN

Miraculous ; but watch them work—
Steam, electricity : behold

Iniquity and rapine lurk

Where'er machinery forges gold !

BASIL

I grant the worst : the piston-rod

Undoes the handicraftsman, seals

The doom of labour ; clad and shod

In unseen lightning, business steals

The garnered wealth of rank and power,

The frugal means of proud content,

The widow's mite, the orphan's dower,

The toiler's hard-earned increment.

LIONEL

And thus the promise darkly given

Fulfil itself : a child can tell

In Rich-and-Poor an actual Heaven

Deep-rooted in an actual Hell !

VIVIAN

Unhallowed jest ! But let me laugh !

By all the powers without a doubt
The railway and the telegraph
Have brought millennium about !

BRIAN

Oh, shame ! That one man may be great
And loll at ease, a god on high,
Beneath, the castings of his fate,
A myriad outworn workers sigh.

BASIL

But how if that be just ? Aha !
The thing is so ; therefore must be.
Skilled and unskilled automata
Would all escape from slavery.

Whoever grasps what all esteem,
What all desire, wealth, power, renown,
Conceives and dares while others dream ;
And he who wins, deserves the crown.

BRIAN

Usurious contracts, lawless gains
That fill the workhouse, stock the haunts
Of vice ?

BASIL

The great world's growing pains
Whose hardy soul no evil daunts !

LIONEL

This very lightning you decry—

BRIAN

Âme damnée by the broker's hearth !
Promoter's tout, exploiter's spy !—

LIONEL

Is yet the angel of the earth.

Not long shall men abuse the sons

Of men ; the tyrant's doom was signed
When lightning learned to rouse at once
The righteous wrath of all mankind.

BASIL

The earth itself is now inspired !

VIVIAN

It knows delight, it feels distress !

LIONEL

Ten thousand wires and nerves unwired
Have given the globe self-consciousness !

BASIL

Why brood and muse on sordid scenes,
Why pick and point at faults and flaws ?
Ignore uncertain ways and means ;
Regard alone the final cause.

BRIAN

Who can declare why man was made ?

BASIL

The lover knows, the children guess ;
War, study, pastime, toil and trade
Have one sole purpose, Happiness.

VIVIAN

Only decaying types incur
Remorse and moral misery !
Were I a great philosopher
This should my metaphysic be,

A mighty Will to Happiness.

LIONEL

Therefore it is the earth is round
And speeds through Heaven, a globe express
For infinite Elysium bound !

VIVIAN

Therefore the orbs that rule the year
Establish seasonable times,
And deck our well-appointed sphere
In purpled robes of diverse climes.

LIONEL

Love therefore sighs with fragrant breath
For loftier heavens and songs unsung.

BASIL

And therefore shall benignant death
Maintain the world for ever young.

LIONEL

Therefore were women made divine,
With beauty, purpose, power to bless
The overloaded masculine
Incarnate Will to Happiness.

VIVIAN

Therefore the all-embracing sea
Doth with tempestuous voice demand,
"What power shall keep the golden key
That opes the gate of every land?"

BRIAN

Therefore we torture heart and brain,
And cherish neither life nor health!
We tax the past, the future drain—

BASIL

In our divine desire for wealth.

We must be rich : for whom should gold
Be meant if not for you and me ?
In every age the wise and bold
Have gathered treasure ardently.

LIONEL

A health to England's golden rose,
Her affluence of material stuff !

VIVIAN

A health to all the rich and those
Who never can be rich enough !

BASIL

And health to England's thrifty sons
And thrifty daughters ; health to all
Courageous, battling, troubled ones
Who keep St. Martha's Festival.

VI

BARTLEMAS

BASIL

LIONEL

VIVIAN

LIONEL

FROM an obsolete, festival mood—

(Ere the people grew wise and aware,

Transcending the bad and the good,

How extinct was the Fun of the Fair)—

Out of Smithfield with vapours endued

Of the rank Babylonian lair,

Where Mirth and her fatherless brood

Carouse it in Bartlemy Fair,

I come, by the mass, by the rood,

From the crusted, old Fun of the Fair!

VIVIAN

From the Forest I come whereabouts
The silences, harvested, throng—
Autumnal the silences throng :
No throstle, no blackbird devout
As the seraphim mingle their song,
With perfume entangle the light
And powder the woodland with pearl,
Nor usher the star-stricken night
With incense and melody rare ;
The song-thrush devout and the merle
No longer enrapture the air
With concord of ruby and pearl.

BASIL

Then you of the Forest shall spin
A tissue of rhythmical words—

Of jewelled, diaphanous words ;
And he shall delight in the din
Of Smithfield and Bartlemas Birds—
In the venial, carnival sin
Of Bartholomew's roustering Birds ;
While I as a guerdon prepare
In our mazer of maple that held
The hydromel, quaffed at the Fair
And older than scriptural eld :
As wassail and guerdon supply,
From a formula ancient as eld
A nectar to drink of and die,
In our mazer of maple, that held
The hydromel quaffed at the Fair
Ere the people grew wise and aware.

VIVIAN

Alack that the truth must be told !
Not once now their dulcimers sweet,

That haunted the Forest of old,
The cuckoos, predominant, beat ;
Their echoing pastoral, tolled
In every o'er-canopied street
On dulcimers, dulcet as gold,
Not now will the cuckoos repeat ;
Reverberant cantos unrolled,
A thunder of dulcimers sweet,
Through the flower-writhen Forest of old
No longer the cuckoos repeat.

LIONEL

But yesterday rose on the air,
With the odour of burning entwined,
The breath of an agonised prayer—
But yesterday, braiding the wind
With an incense, nor holy, nor rare
When they tortured the flesh and the mind—
The body as well as the mind ;

When the learned and the lewd had to die
For the rights of the tongue and the pen,
And martyrdom shrouded the sky
In the smoke of the burning of men ;
Where now in the shouldering press
Of the stareabouts destined to stare,
By the booths and the stalls in the stress
Of the tide and the trough of the Fair—
In the narrows and straits of the Fair,
While the cressets, the torches, and links,
Beginning to blossom and flare
As the sun in the occident sinks
With phantoms embroider the air—
While the cressets and vaporous links,
As the sun that transfigured the Fair
In his western brazier sinks,
With witchcraft impregnate the air,
Arises the mercantile cry
As of souls in the depths of despair—

Of a people at home with despair,

“What lack you and what will you buy?”

The challenge and lure of the Fair!

“What lack you, sirs? Buy, will you buy?

Ripe costard or Catherine pear?

Is it hey for the lust of the eye?

Will you trip it, coranto or jig?

But first you must eat or you die,

Of a hallowed Bartholomew pig—

Of a savoury Bartlemas pig!”

Then hey for the Fun of the Fair,

The babel of noise and the cry,

The turbulent shows in the glare

Of the cressets that lacquer the sky—

That fume as they lacquer the sky!

It's ho for the Fun of the Fair!

And it's hey for the lust of the eye!

Ripe costard and Catherine pear,

And the yellow gowns fluttering by—

Green sleeves at Bartholomew Fair,
And the light of a riotous eye !

BASIL

Green leaves in the Forest ; green sleeves—
I modulate Lionel's cry—
At the Fair ; in the Forest, green leaves,
And the glance of an innermost eye.

VIVIAN

No longer the nightingales chant
To the silvery pulses of night,
That echo the measure and grant
Responsal of starry delight :
No nightingales longer descant
To the stars as they throb with delight
Of the passionate answer they grant
The music that troubles the night—

As they vibrate and bloom with delight
In the hanging gardens of night.
For the silences, harvested, throng,
Though the gold and purpureal dye—
Though the lacquer, the mordant, and dye
Of the autumn, like sounds of a song
Into colour transmutable, lie
On the Forest—the crystalline tune
That the spheres were imagined to play
Into colour transformed in the noon
Of an ever adventurous day;
Above and within and about,
The perfected silences throng—
In the Forest the silences throng:
No throstle, no blackbird devout
As the seraphim mingle their song,
With perfume entangle the light
And powder the woodland with pearl,

Nor usher the star-stricken night
With incense and melody rare ;
The song-thrush devout and the merle
No longer enrapture the air
With concord of ruby and pearl ;
Nor now can the nightingale sing
Expecting a stellar reply ;
No fugues intergarlanded ring
Of the earth and the clusters on high—
Sidereal echoes that bring
The crystalline tears and the sigh
For the end of a beautiful thing
That soldered the earth and the sky.

VII

OUR DAY

"Nelson had several times said to Captain Hardy and Dr. Scott, 'The 21st will be our day.'"

—MAHAN'S *Life of Nelson*.

BASIL

VIVIAN

BASIL

THE chill wind whispers winter : night sets in;
And now, by many a sounding thoroughfare,
Life, like a tidal wave, begins to fill
The theatres and halls and hidden nooks,
Wherein it clangs and seethes and spends
itself.

Enter LIONEL

And whence come you ?

VIVIAN

From wandering to and fro
Somewhere in London—London the unknown;
Which none can ever know, none ever see,
But only wonder at and wander in!

BASIL

The City of the World, ancient and proud,
Vast, thronged, and awful; richer than the floor
Of ocean and its unsacked treasure-house;
An insolent city and a beautiful;
A place of mirth and sadness infinite:
Of infinite horror, infinite despair,
Infinite courage and felicity.
What! Do we read your thoughts, your eyes
that speak
Of greatnesses beheld?

LIONEL

All day I saw
A greater thing than London ; now at night
The ample vision looms more excellent—
The vision of a thing that shall endure
When London is as Babylon ; shall shine
A jewel in eternal memory ;
Shall on the summit of achievement burn,
A challenge and a beacon for the brave :
The perfect battle-pageant of the deep,
Trafalgar.

BASIL

You beheld Trafalgar ?

LIONEL

Now !

I watch it now !

VIVIAN

Show us this sight of sights !
Make us behold Trafalgar and the pride
Of England, Nelson !

LIONEL

Look and see ; who looks
With insight, can ! A fragile form,
The delicate sheath of valour absolute ;
Ambition, daring, honour, constancy,
Prescience, dominion, passion, scope, design,
A woman's tenderness, an infant's awe,
An adamant courage, mercy, power
Attuned and fateful in an invalid !
Sea-lord, sea-god, his clear, transcendent love
Endowed his friends with lustre of his own,
And saw no blemish for excess of light

Which his great spirit shed: his glittering
scorn,

His hate for England's sake of England's foes,
Diviner than his love, at England's need
O'erthrew the splendid Titan who essayed
To wrest the loyal sea from English hands,
Holding in trust that greatest gift of Fate.
The Nile, the Baltic, saw his pregnant war;
The palsied navies shrivelled at his touch;
So suddenly he came, so swiftly smote,
So wholly conquered, that his deeds remain
The bulwark maritime of England's power.
Nothing could tame his soul: that ocean-hunt
About the Atlantic and about in quest
Of action France and Spain denied,
Whetted his lust of battle; long delay,
That withers enterprise and rots desire
Even of enduring things, augmented all

His purpose and matured the valiant seed
Of utmost victory. Wherefore upon the dawn
Foreknown of battle—for the Admiral said
“The twenty-first will be our day”—he paced
His quarter-gallery subtly clad already
In the shadow of his glory; prepossessed
Besides with death; and like a spirit calm
That treads the threshold of eternity.

Now, when the morning brimmed the western
world,

And on the weather-gleam a headland rose
Assured of fame, and the confederate fleets
Appeared between, hull crowding hull, five
miles

Of armament, our great sea-warrior bade
The battle be. Southward the ships of France,
The ships of Spain, northward the English
sailed,

As if they meant to pass each other by
In some majestic ritual of the tide.
But Nelson's signals, winged like thought aloft,
Undid that minuet! Twelve sail of his,
The weather line, with Collingwood to lee,
Bore up amain—the wind west by nor'-west—
And eastward stood athwart the banded fleets,
That veered unwieldily and headed north
With safe retreat on Cadiz, till Nelson's touch
Precipitated battle—he on their van
And Collingwood against their southern flank:
Two columns opportunely; yet to the end
The sailing order held the battle-line—
Our Admiral's prophecy and inspired device.
That happy signal first: "England expects
That every man will do his duty"; then
Drums beat to quarters: gunners, stripped and
girt,

The naked flesh of England against the fire
And rending bolt of England's foes, unlashed
Their ordnance : frowning crews, equipped
With linstock, priming-iron, rammer, wad,
Crowbar and handspike, cartridge, wreaths of
shot,

Stood by each carronade, each red-lipped gun ;
Topman and boarder, trimmer, musketeer,
Marine and powder-boy fulfilled his post,
His deed, his errand, transfigured suddenly.
The ceremonial wind controlled the approach,
Keeping a pageant-pace ; and towering sails
Of England's navy, sheeted to the sky,
Slumbered at ease, a dulcet, virgin sleep,
So placid in their bosoms the breath of heaven
Dwelt like a dream, as every vessel, groomed
For war and marshalled on the vagrant surge
Of coming tempest, rode to victory.

France fired the nuptial gun ; the flags broke out
Of every nation, and the battle joined.

In front of England the *Royal Sovereign* first
Achieved the enemy's range. The *Victory* next,
Silent against a navy's broadsides, forged
Ahead ; and when her double-shotted guns,
One after one, at twenty feet had ploughed
The *Bucentaure* endlong, aboard the doomed
Redoubtable she ran. Forthwith amid
The din of cannon against cannon, mouth
To bellowing mouth, the shriek of timber
crashed

And rent, the thund'rous voice of men absorbed
In the wild trance and waking dream of war,
Carnage and agony and the rhythmic swing
And travail of the deed, as Nelson paced
His quarter-deck awaiting the superb,
Unmatched event his genius had ordained,

The fatal marksman in the enemy's top
Espied his honours and England's hero fell.
Down in the winepress of the war where
blood

O'erflowed the orlop, where the wounded
strewed

The noisome cockpit and the grimy sweat
Cooled on the labouring surgeons, Nelson died:
The swarthy smoke that coiled from poop to
hold

Obscured the glimmering lanterns ; overhead
The cannon leapt ; like a taut rope the hull
Quivered from stem to stern with every shot ;
And still above the thunder of the strife,
Cresting the uproar, pealed the great hurrah
Of all the English crews, as ship by ship
The baffled navies struck and Nelson's name
Became immortal.

VIVIAN

Such a dying deed !

BASIL

So great a life, so great a death, so great
A legacy of Empire !

LIONEL

All are ours,
And will be ours while Nelson's fame endures:
Great lives, great deaths for England the sea !

VIII

NEW YEAR'S EVE

CYRIL BERTRAM EVERARD CLARENCE

CYRIL

THE earth reposes : bird and beast
Are neutral-hued in copse and dell ;
The very grass-green turf has ceased
To grow till Spring shall break the spell.

BERTRAM

From frozen seas the north wind blows,
From sapphire icebergs rooted deep
In Arctic fathoms.

EVERARD

Ancient snows
About the poles renew their sleep.

CYRIL

Old continents of snow—world-old !
How comfortable there to lie
Embalmed in everlasting cold
In peace and crystal purity !

CLARENCE

Let these amenities increase ;
But though the north be hoar with rime,
Give me the vineyard's purple peace,
The golden peace of harvest-time ;

A peace with cannon frankly girt,
An armament in every sea ;

A peace that wears a blood-red skirt
Deep-dyed in many a victory ;

The purity of healthy lives,
Of love that sings both high and low,
Of genial husbands, happy wives,
Of mothers purer than the snow.

CYRIL

Winter's a dream : the fallows feel
The hope of tilth ; each blossom chaste,
Against the cold in Milan steel
Of stout hibernacle encased,

Glow with a vision of the Spring,
The fragrance and the stain of June ;
And thrushes on a sudden sing
The motive of their Summer tune.

BERTRAM

Hush! hark! St. Paul's!

EVERARD

Each vibrant thought,
An orb of music, fills the ear
With rich harmonics interwrought.

CYRIL

The year is dead!

BERTRAM

Long live the year!

EVERARD

Now midnight through the city rings;
A hundred reeling belfries chime,
With overtones like rhythmic strings,
The lofty madrigal of Time.

CYRIL

The world speeds in a trance profound
From dark abyss to dark abyss
Across this twelve-arched bridge of sound
Between the two eternities.

BERTRAM

Who'll give the dreaming earth a shock,
Who set its torpid mind aglow ?

CYRIL

Is there an ink to etch the rock,
Ethereal lye to blanch the snow ?

A cresset to contain the sun,
A crystal cup to hold the sea,
A voice to rouse the dead and done,
A highway through the galaxy ?

Discover these, or things as strange,
Then shift the earth and turn the year !
Discover these, then seek to change
The mood of men, the world's career !

CLARENCE

There is a dish to hold the sea,
A brazier to contain the sun,
A compass for the galaxy,
A voice to wake the dead and done !

That minister of ministers,
Imagination, gathers up
The undiscovered Universe
Like jewels in a jasper cup.

Its flame can mingle north and south ;
Its accent with the thunder strive ;

The ruddy sentence of its mouth
Can make the ancient dead alive.

The mart of power, the fount of will,
The form and mould of every star,
The source and bound of good and ill,
The key of all the things that are,

Imagination, new and strange
In every age, can turn the year,
Can shift the poles and lightly change
The mood of men, the world's career.

CYRIL

What cry is this? What mad to-do?
When and by whom is this great power
That melts and forges worlds anew
Installed and used? The man, the hour?

CLARENCE

No other time—we understand
Nor whence, nor whither, why nor how—
Is ever at the world's command
Than this eternal present Now.

CYRIL

You rede the riddle of the earth,
The ancient rule of all who ride ;
And young it is as every birth,
As new and fresh as time and tide :—

By town and tower, through brake and briar,
About the world while life shall last,
Unbroken horses shod with fire
The wild-eyed moments thunder past :

Who grasps the flying mane and mounts,
Indifferent if he fail or thrive,
In happy stride with all that counts
Arrives where'er the gods arrive.

CLARENCE

'Tis not enough to mount and ride,
No saddle, bridle, whip, nor spur ;
To take the chance of time and tide,
And follow fame without demur.

I want some reason with my rhyme,
A fateful purpose when I ride ;
I want to tame the steeds of Time,
To harness and command the tide :

I want a whip whose braided lash
Can echo like the crack of doom ;

I want an iron mace to smash

The world and give the peoples room.

CYRIL

We thought we knew you ! Who are you

That talk so loud ?

CLARENCE

One who can tell

That false is false and true is true,

Alive or dead, in Heaven or Hell.

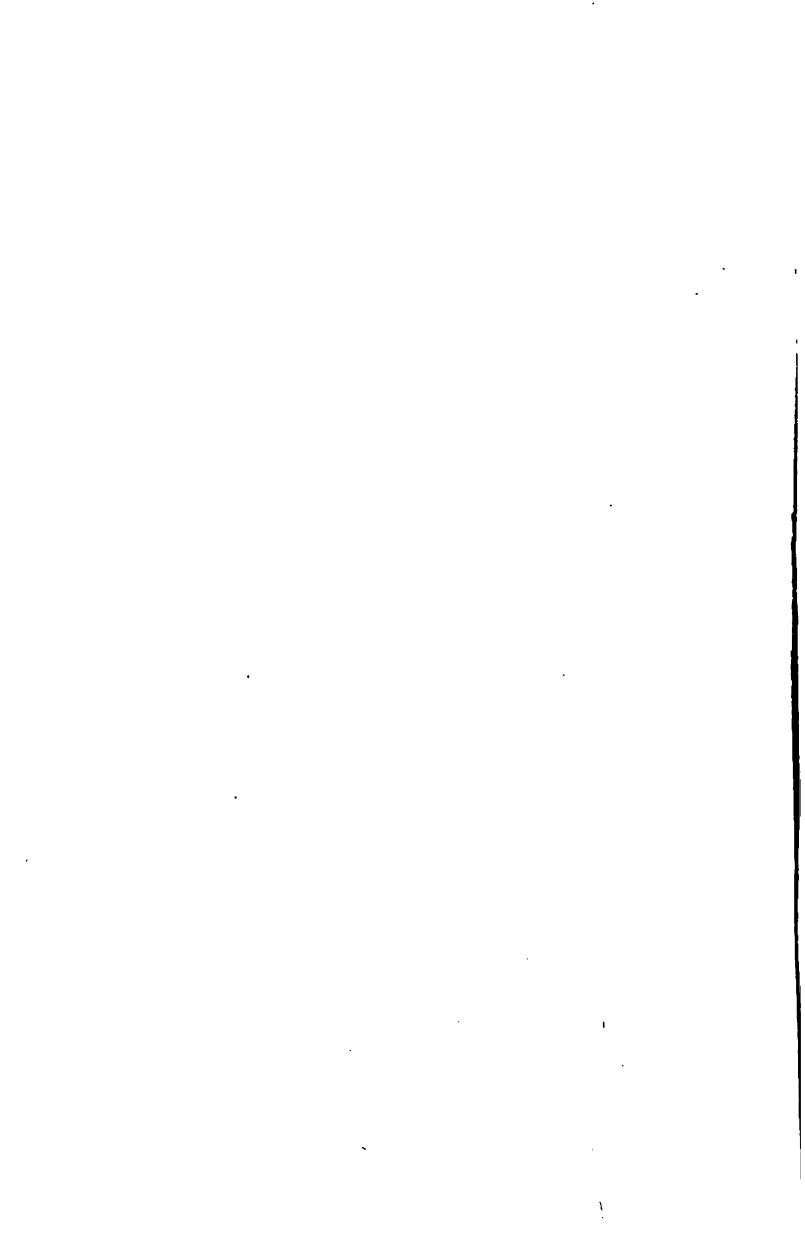
L'ENVOI

BORN, enamoured, built of fact,
Daily on destruction's brink
Venture all to put in act
Truth we trust and thought we think.

Nothing has been said or done :
Free from the forbidding past,
Knowledge only now begun
Makes an actual world at last.

Powers of Earth, of Heaven, of Hell,
Blent in us and tried and true,
By dynamic deed and spell
Forge and mould the world anew.

ON POETRY



ON POETRY

WHEN my Testaments and Tragedies began I thought I was to write blank verse to the end. A year ago, however, an exposition of rhyme overtook me. This volume, with a new speculative interest in rhyme itself, is the result.

Rhyme is probably seven hundred years old; still, I suppose it may be called modern. The fall of Constantinople, the invention of printing, and the Renaissance make a great frontier between the new and the antique; but, behind this frontier and buttressing it, there stretches back, among other spurs and ranges, the quasi-popularisation of poetry by the Minnesingers and the Troubadours in the gorgeous decadence of the last crusades. These liberal minstrels led Poetry out of the

study and the scriptorium into the court and the camp, and arrayed her for her novel rôle in the new-fangled frippery of rhyme. The nun became a glee-maiden, or rather, as they could not lead about a naked goddess, they paraded instead a bedizened harlotry, very delightful and much more convenable than the austere and unadorned beauty of rhymeless verse ; and since the days of the Minnesingers, the Jongleurs, Trouvères, and Troubadours, and from Dante to Mr. Swinburne, the exquisite adornment of rhyme has corrupted the ear of the world. Rhyme is a property of decadence ; but decadence in any art is always the manure and root of a higher manifestation of that art. Dante and Petrarch quickly subdued the new wanton mode. In time there came into being the French Alexandrine and the English rhymed pentameter, and, as the crown of the whole poetical aim of the world, English blank verse. Yet, at its best, rhyme is a decadent mode, although great ages and great poets have made it the

vehicle of creative work. It is a special flattery of the external ear; it is as rouge on the cheek and belladonna on the eye; or it is an excrescence like a sixth finger, "a wasteful and ridiculous excess." I am not thinking of bad poetry, but of the best. Take the first quatrain of Shakespeare's seventy-third sonnet:—

"That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."

The rhymes of this quatrain toll like a dead-bell; we pass from a sombre forest to a dim cathedral; the fancy is overwhelmed with vision, both detailed and indefinite, in order to bring the rhymes about; there is a feeling of effort, as of a thing achieved; and it is the rhyme that achieves. It is not the poet, not the poetry, but the rhyme that requires this laborious "or none, or few"; it is the rhyme that requires those superbly imagined "boughs which shake against the cold" to

shift at once as by the waft of a rococo conjurer's wand into "bare ruin'd choirs." Yet it is beautiful, it is poignant; it entertains the fancy, fills the eye and ear, and touches the soul.

But, now, let Macbeth say the same thing without rhyme:—

"My way of life
Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf."

No comment is necessary; the hair of the flesh stands up, and one feels that there is a great gulf fixed between rhyme and blank verse.

I know nothing so entertaining, so absorbing, so full of contentment, as the making of blank verse; it is a supreme relief of nervous tension, the fullest discharge of emotion, the greatest deliverance of energy; it satisfies the blood and the brain, the bones and the marrow. Whether the reader be friend or foe, I wish him to regard my authority in the matter; and I bring as a credential a passage of my own blank verse. The passage I quote

is not my own selection, nor would I have chosen it ; it has been singled out by others.

“ Undo the past !

The rainbow reaches Asgard now no more ;
Olympus stands untenanted ; the dead
Have their serene abode in earth itself,
Our womb, our nurture, and our sepulchre.
Expel the sweet imaginings, profound
Humanities and golden legends, forms
Heroic, beauties, tripping shades embalmed
Through hallowed ages in the fragrant hearts
And generous blood of men ; the climbing thoughts
Whose roots ethereal grope among the stars,
Whose passion-flowers perfume eternity,
Weed out and tear, scatter and tread them down ;
Dismantle and dilapidate high heaven.”

That the above passage should be both fluent and powerful stands to reason, as it is the long-matured, spontaneous expression of a permanent mood of the world which has its crises in reformations and revolutions, and which in the twentieth century will arm itself for action more hearted and more terrible than all the wars and persecutions of the past, and which will restore to religion, art, and letters a youth and a freshness more radiant and

more fragrant than they ever wore even in their prime and pristine vigour. The world is only beginning. We have done nothing, said nothing, sung nothing. The history of the past is the history of one empire at a time. Now several empires must compete together. The world will yet know more essential personalities than Buddha and Christ, greater men than Cæsar and Napoleon, deeper passion and wider humanity than Shakespeare's, a music still more elemental than Wagner's, a sadder soul than Schopenhauer's, a more triumphant intellect than Nietzsche's, beauty more enthralling than Helen's. Even the man in the train knows that we live in the newest times ; it is borne in upon him, half fearfully, half ecstatically, as he reads his morning newspaper, that the world is barely adolescent, and that its majority cannot be until after a thousand years of war between the East and the West, when the yellow man and the white man have fought it out on equal terms, and learnt which is master.

Poetry is Matter become vocal, a blind force without judgment. Much there is a poet can control; he acquires a vocabulary, sifts and sorts; he can select the theme of his poem, and the weight and convolutions of his brain determine the power and variety of his rhythm, but the purport of his poetry is not within his own control. A hard saying, in England of all places; but I mean it. Milton undertakes to justify the ways of God to man in "Paradise Lost." He may have done so in terms of his theology—who cares? That is not the poetry of his epic; the poetry of it is the love of Adam and Eve, and the rebellion of Satan. He who set out to justify the ways of God to man lives in the heart and soul of every stockbroker, soldier, adventurer, artist, poet, by one line which no one who knows it ever forgets: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." The very voice of Matter; the vapours, earths, and metals, the complected properties of Matter of which man consists, become eloquent; it

is the voice of rocks and ores, of patriotism, of art, of religion, of all unconquerable will; the triumph of the martyr at the stake; the "yea and amen" of that pure flame which our Universe was once and will be once more. Matter says its will in poetry; above all, in English blank verse, and often, as in the case of Milton, entirely against the conscious intention of the poet. When Matter uses a free mind, "of imagination all compact," like Shakespeare's, then are its happiest moments; it is then it can express the flower and fragrance of its highest achievement, the human race, in the night-watches of Juliet; the mutability of its own substance in Prospero's speech of "the great globe itself"; and its own subconscious memories of the fire of the nebula and the terror and splendour of its contraction and resolution into a Universe in the speech of Claudio:—

"This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside

In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice ;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world."

Our English blank verse is to me an intimation of something very great and high, and a thing so simple that a child can understand it; but language is so saturated with metaphysic, æsthetic, and every kind of immateriality, that it is almost impossible to get it said. It must be tried. English blank verse came into being when a new mode of expression was needed—by the design of Providence, the theologian will say; in metaphysic, as an inevitable outcome of the conditions; or, as I can feel, see, and grasp it best, English blank verse came into being like folk, or flowers, or cholera, or war, or lightning, or light, as a material emanation of the concrete mystery, Matter; that is to say, the earth, having cooled down and produced life in plants, *plus* consciousness in animals, *plus* self-consciousness, or what is called soul,

in men; men having found in the temperate mid-regions of Europe their fittest environment, and all that was most courageous, hardiest, and most ambitious in the North Temperate Zone having poured into England instinctively as into the womb of the future, and having fought there together for centuries in Wars of the Heptarchy, Norman Conquests, Scotch Wars of Independence—Angle, Saxon, Jute, Dane, Norseman, and Norman wrestling together for the mastery, and producing in the struggle the blended breed of men we know: so tried and welded, so tempered and damascened, this English race, having thrown off the fetters of a worn-out creed, having obtained the kingdom of the sea and begun to lay hands, as by right, on the new world, burst out into blank verse without premeditation, and earth thrilled to its centre with delight that Matter had found a voice at last. I think it is not the opinion of Englishmen alone, but of all serious students of literature, that English blank verse is the subtlest,

most powerful, and most various organ of utterance articulate faculty has produced. In some quarters it is still debated whether blank verse or prose is the better vehicle of dramatic utterance; and the superiority of prose is supported by Hamlet's speech of "this goodly frame the earth," and "the paragon of animals." The effect on the mind of the intelligent reader of that prose speech of Hamlet's is probably greater than the effect of any of the blank verse of the play; but it is a different effect, and only those who dislike poetry can prefer it to Hamlet's verse utterances. The prose, moreover, is not nearly so wonderful as its admirers maintain. "This majestical roof fretted with golden fire" is superficial imagery; and the outcry beginning, "What a piece of work is a man!" is only a very fine exclamatory passage, trumpets and instruments of percussion compared with the "gradual violin" of blank verse. I have never had any doubt that blank verse is as much superior to prose for the pur-

poses of dramatic art as oil-colour is to water-colour in painting; and Shakespeare was of the same opinion, because he chose blank verse generally for all his higher matter to the end of his career.

This wonderful style of expression, blank verse, came into being in a small speck of sparsely inhabited land elbowed out upon the smallest continent of one of the most insignificant planets of the least considerable system in the Universe. Bulk, spacial magnitude, are not momentous, are in themselves neither significant nor efficient. The earth is to the Universe as England is to the rest of the globe, small in itself and small in relation to its continent or system. But out of our nook-shotten isle comes the profoundest and most intelligent voice of Matter, English blank verse; and by this salient and infinitely satisfying analogy, I leap to the conclusion that Matter nowhere in the Universe has evolved anything transcending mundane man, or a nobler utterance than this very blank verse.

Whether he be Homer the nondescript, Dante the outcast, Shakespeare the player, or Burns the exciseman, the great poet is always a man apart, separated out by his genius, and by some tragic circumstance. He may have to extort a living as a mendicant; he may provide for himself handsomely at a terrible cost, until his name "receives a brand," and his nature is almost "subdued to what it works in"; or he may die of a broken heart gauging whiskey-barrels—that was the most withering tragedy of all: but he is always great, always an imperial person; he may be neglected and despised in his lifetime, but his will is always to live, his will is always set on power, his empire remains. That is the great poet; and his great poetry is the affirmation of the will to live, the affirmation of the will to power. This imperial passion to be finds expression in such an utterance as Romeo's death-speech, ending:—

"Here's to my love! (*Drinks.*) O true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die."

You are in the presence of the final triumph of the will to live, which every sane suicide must be; despair—really the highest power and sublimation of hope—choosing death rather than resignation; the will to live, the pride of life that *cannot* renounce, the beautiful, the transcendent passion whereby the world survives, destroying itself rather than want its will.

The mate of the imperial passion to be, that other imperial passion, the will to power, cries out upon its topmost note in the stupendous agony of the last act of "Macbeth"—any speech of Macbeth's in that act; take the one—not the greatest—ending:—

"I 'gin to be aweary of the sun,
And wish the estate of the world were now undone.
Ring the alarum-bell! Blow, wind! come, wrack!
At least we'll die with harness on our back."

The poet—Macbeth is pure poet, will to live and will to power informing and impassioning an imagination which is its own and only law; Macbeth, stark imagination, steeped in the

blood of friend and foe; dying of suppressed remorse; unslept, mad; beguiling himself—consciously, dauntlessly beguiling himself with the foolishlest kind of augury, will not renounce, will not resign: “If I cannot have my way, then let the world end; not me only, see you, but the world. I’ll have *it* stopped too”—the final triumph of the will to power. There is nothing more astonishing in Shakespeare than the last words of Macbeth. This gentleman and soldier, who wooed and won his splendid, powerful wife, with all her “red gold and green forests”—a Rita Allmers, unable, unwilling, to make her peace with “the great, open eyes”—this proud king and eloquent, who spoke in wonderful poems, when the last gossamer thread of witchcraft is blown away by Macduff’s announcement of his untimely birth, becomes on the instant crude boy, stripped of everything except the will to power—to get the better of the other fellow. And Macbeth enjoys his last fight; he rushes into it, adapting and shouting out

a bombastic tag from some story he had read in his schooldays:—

“ Before my body
I throw my warlike shield : lay on, Macduff ;
And damned be him that first cries “ Hold, enough ! ”

To me that is more pregnant with dramatic insight than Lear’s “ Pray you, undo this button.”

Nothing is easier than to recognise great poetry: simply, it makes men desire the fullness of time; it makes men desire puissance and applause; and it provides them with an antepast of these.

I have not selected my illustrations; I took those that first suggested themselves, and refer the reader to the speeches in which the quotations, themselves of small poetic value, occur. I remember, however, certain homœopathic doses—touchstones or re-agents, tincture of the sun, diamonds of the first water—exhibited by Matthew Arnold in some preface or other. There is no question of *their* quality. They were adduced in illus-

tration of his Aristotelian "high seriousness," the mark of the greatest poetry. I dislike the phrase "high seriousness": a pedantic frowiness hangs about it; it is redolent of classroom and lecture—precinct and atmosphere alien to the genius of poetry. But before I transmute this phrase, let me quote Matthew Arnold's specimens. I remember three of them; if not all from one preface, they are his selection, and they are sufficient; they were chosen by a master in verbal criticism.

The first is from Henry IV.'s complaint upon sleep:—

"Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge."

The dazzling adventurousness of the imagery, and the perfect security thereof; the completeness of the vision, full of the darkness of night; the humming water, the diapason of the storm, and the soul of the world in the wet ship-boy at rest in the lap of fate, bring

the heart into the mouth, and bend the will
upon the noblest love and the loftiest deeds.

The second is one line:—

“Absent thee from felicity awhile.”

Who shall imagine what sudden sight flashed
upon Hamlet’s dying fancy, what Shakespeare
saw as he penned that golden line? Some
eternity of passionate emprise, some

“wonder, at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest.”

The third is the naked will to power:—

“And courage never to submit or yield,
And what is else not to be overcome.”

These three ensamples have this character
in common that they fill the mind with a
sense of everlastingness, and dispose the
heart to undertake and to perform the labours
of Hercules with ease and delight. Repeat
any of these passages with a sense of their
import, and you have a feeling like that of
the earth itself which moves in its appointed
orbit, unresting, unhasting, poised in space

and swift about the sun, a conscious miracle. And thus, if we must have a single phrase to denote the nature of great poetry, let us say that its inmost being is a "transcendent mirth," maternity that sings a song in the pangs of travail, life that will be life, and a radiant fighting welcome to the stroke of doom. Poetry is the will to live and the will to power; poetry is the empire. Poetry is life and force; and England, being most amply replenished with the will to live and the will to power, possesses in her blank verse the greatest poetry in the world.

But in spite of the superiority of blank verse, the exquisite adornment of rhyme will continue to corrupt the ear, the seeing ear as well as the hearing ear; it is mainly with the ear the reader of poetry sees. A speculative writer suggested once that the eye is a degenerate organ, the malversation of some higher perceptive power, inconceivable in range and penetration. By such an analogy the ear was originally intended for vision as

well as audition ; the tympanum and tympanic membrane, when one considers them, are clearly a combination of mirror and sounding-board. Why the mirror remains inoperative we cannot say, since no blind beggar has, up to this time of writing, developed vision by light refracted through the auditory canal ; but the reader of poetry knows very well that the optic nerve responds like a taut string to the rhymes that vibrate in the membranous labyrinth of the ear ; and he knows also that the prompt vision flashed on the inward eye by the percussion of rhyme has injured the palate of this double sense of seeing and hearing, so that the subtler sound and loftier sight transmitted by the rhythm of blank verse are hardly possible now to his over-stimulated, frayed, and angry senses. Poetry is therefore as little understood as it ever was, rhyme—as necessary to the general verse-reader as brandy to the brandy-drinker—being only an ornament. A sense of shame, indeed, struggles vainly towards a blush in

the cheeks of the many-headed when it turns its galaxy of eyes on a page of blank verse; its subconscious feeling is of something indecorous, if not indecent. The feeling is just. Blank verse is nude poetry, barbarous and beautiful, or athletic and refined, but always naked and unashamed. Civilisation, which in all countries is in great part a development and a sanction of every kind of stupidity and misconception, could perhaps be helped out of its utter artistic perdition in England by a great thing, native here—blank verse, namely; and by another great thing, which we should have to import—sculpture. But that could only be brought about as a result of some great national movement, when the minds and imaginations of all men are fused into one mood of aspiration, and so uplifted into unwonted power.

Schopenhauer has an interesting and questionable note on this subject. Having spoken wisely and well of rhyme as an unexpected present which agreeably surprises us, he pro-

ceeds to affirm that rhyme is, of its nature, binary; "its effect," he says, "is limited to one single recurrence of the same sound, and is not strengthened by more frequent repetition, because the first note does not sound through the second on to the third; therefore the third recurrence is an æsthetic pleonasm, a double courage which is of no use." To me rhyme itself is the double courage. Call it a beautiful disease, an excess of health, having come into being it obeys the law that came into being with it.

Let me illustrate by quotations from this book:—

“Not now can the nightingale sing,
Expecting a stellar reply;
No fugues intergarlanded ring
Of the earth and the clusters on high—
Sidereal echoes that bring
The crystalline tears and the sigh
For the end of a beautiful thing
That soldered the earth and the sky.”

—*Bartlemas.*

Here each recurrence of the rhyme doubles the effect of its predecessor. Violins and

cymbals begin with "sing" and "reply"; with "ring" and "high" the second fiddles and the oboes join in; with "bring" and "sigh" the clarionet and the bass viol speak aloud; and all these sounds are still vibrating in the ear when "thing" and "sky" complete the diapason with the remaining wood-wind and the brass.

A second quotation to show that a word can be used as a rhyme to itself:—

"From the Forest I come whereabout
The silences, harvested, throng—
Autumnal, the silences throng.
No throstle, no blackbird devout
As the seraphim mingle their song,
With perfume entangle the light
And powder the woodland with pearl,
Nor usher the star-stricken night
With incense and melody rare;
The song-thrush devout and the merle
No longer enrapture the air
With concord of ruby and pearl."

—*Bartlemas.*

A tabor leads off upon "about"; a single clarigold rings in the first "throng"; and

two others immediately take up the burden an octave lower in the second "throng"; "devout" and "song" bring in the psaltery and the anome; "light," "night," "rare," "air," add to these sackbuts and timbrels; with the first "pearl" the dulcimer sounds; the syrinx replies in "merle"; the second "pearl" is a double dulcimer; and the whole fantastic orchestra fills the evening air with richly braided sound.

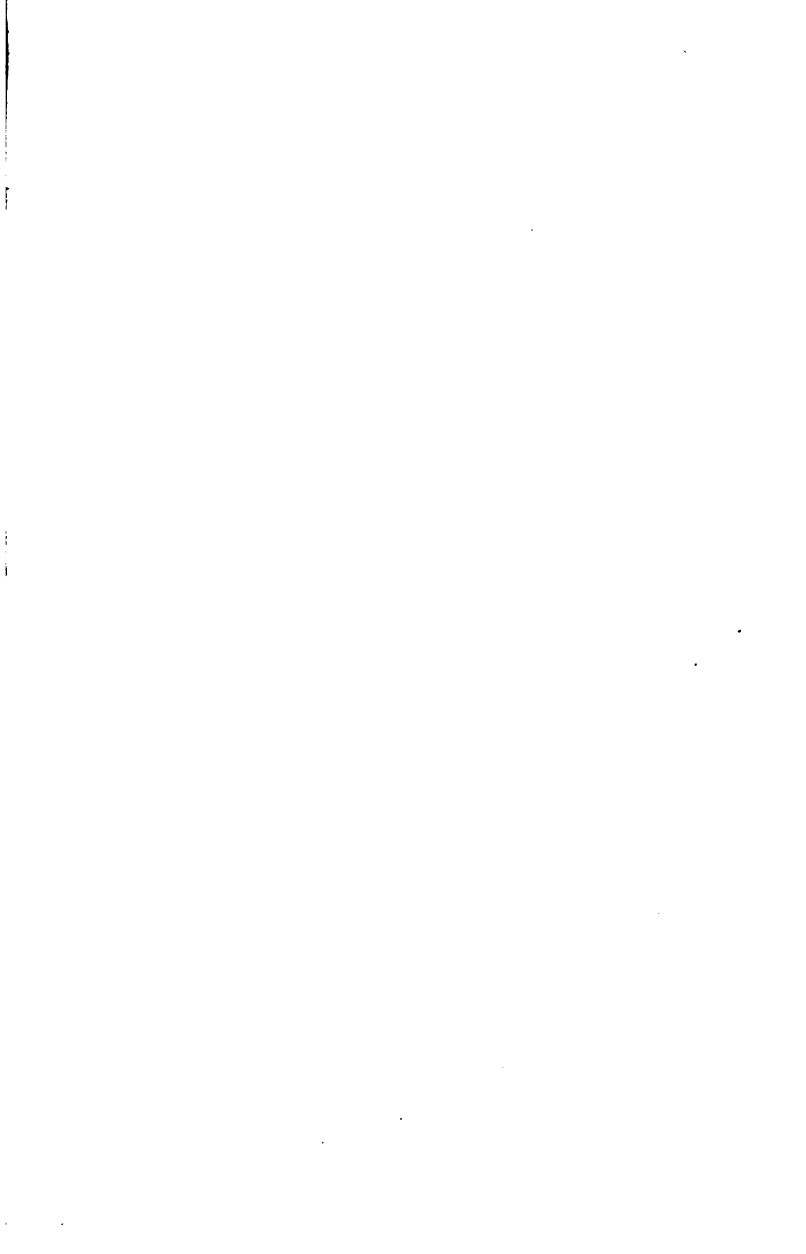
✓ Schopenhauer is evidently wrong. The law in the matter is this: the effect of a rhyme increases geometrically in the ratio of its recurrence.

✓ It will be seen that both of these quotations are decadent verse, the first dealing with a matter, namely, the music of the spheres, which is no longer an accepted myth, while the second is a threnody celebrating the fall of the leaf. Rhyme is originally a property of decadence; and when new decay demands expression a new order of rhyme is certainly evolved. The form of re-echoing rhyme which

I have used in some of the eclogues in this volume comes, of course, from America, the exquisite invention of the most original genius in words the world has known—Edgar Allan Poe. It is impossible to over-estimate the intensity of the mood in which this poet discovered that the same word can rhyme to itself with an entirely new sound if the preceding phraseology is changed; this is the intensity that gilds the autumn leaf, that emigrates to America and establishes the United States, that crimsones the evening sky, that crosses the Atlantic to haunt Europe passionately, that fills a dying fancy with the whole past in a moment of time. America is the decadence of Europe. Chivalry reappears there in the tyranny of pretty women and the liberty of divorce. Religion becomes a coarse sentimental pietism, and revisits us with an impudent slap in the face in the form of Moody and Sankey; our splendid robbers, Clive, Hastings, Rhodes, degenerate there into the pickpockets of the Trusts; there the Celt

flourishes, and the negro is burned alive. I find all that in "Ulalume" and "The Haunted Palace." Poe's poems are the decadence of the literature of Europe, the seed of the literature of America: they, and not Whitman's overrated rhapsodies. But all decadent forms can immediately become crecive: I have used this form of re-echoing rhyme in an ascendant poem in this volume, "Merry England." Literary criticism is in its infancy: the great crecive poem of Christendom, "The Divine Comedy," took the decadent form of rhyme; the great decadent poem of Christendom, "Paradise Lost," fell upon the ascendant form of blank verse.

April 1906.



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